

Michigan Freedom Trail Commission Meeting Minutes

University of Detroit Mercy, Commerce & Finance 118

Detroit, Michigan

February 18, 2016

Commissioners present: Rochelle Danquah, Roy Finkenbine, Juanita Moore, Michael Nassaney, David Teeter

Conference Call: None

Excused: Tamara Barnes, Ronald Brown, Edwina Murphy, Robin Peebles, James Turner

Absent: Kim Davis Tranumn

Staff present: Sandra Clark, Mary Patrick

Guests: None

Danquah called the meeting to order at 1:08 PM.

Introductions: None.

Agenda: Finkenbine moved to approve the agenda; Teeter seconded the motion, and the agenda was approved without objection.

Minutes: Finkenbine moved to approve the October 2, 2014, conference call meeting minutes as presented; Teeter seconded the motion, and they were approved without objection.

Public Comment: None.

Action Items:

- a. Network to Freedom Applications: Danquah reported that she is working on the DeGarmo Fuller cemetery site nomination and that Carol Mull is writing a nomination for the Finney Barn and possibly Elmwood Cemetery. Nassaney asked about the status of the Ramptown nomination. Former commissioner Veta Tucker began working on it in 2007 and Amanda Campbell conducted research on the site, but it had been held up due to the lack of owner permission. Ms. Campbell has returned to Michigan, eager to resume her research, and the Cass County Historical Society wishes to be involved. Because of the site's ambiguity, Nassaney's students at WMU turned the Ramptown nomination project they were working on into a nomination for Stephen Bogue. Clark will contact Veta Tucker for any information about the site. Finkenbine will contact Carolyn Carter, Wayne County Community College, about a nomination she is writing for the Atwater Docks launch area; he continues his work on the Second Baptist Church nomination.
- b. Strategic Agenda: Setting New Goals: Clark shared the 2014-15 Annual Report that was submitted to Governor Rick Snyder. Discussion was held about the FTC's goals and narrowing its focus. Many ideas were shared:

- Marking program: Ready to implement if grant money can be found, or people who have sites to mark could be offered the option to purchase a marker. Publicize the program.
 - Public information: The National Network to Freedom sites are a good resource, but some of the things currently listed no longer exist or have changed from their original form. All Michigan listings and contact information must be verified and the NPS notified of inaccuracies. Centralize information and make pamphlets available to the public. Things to add to the NPS site include the Wright Museum for both its programs and institution; the Detroit Historical Museum exhibit; and possibly, a program by Vaughn Washington, formerly with WMU about Nathan Thomas.
 - Website: Update the web page to include FTC-vetted programs and a two-tiered bibliography that would reduce the necessity of changing the site and require less maintenance. Tier 1 for sites and Tier 2 for programs. When accuracy is confirmed, sites and programs can be linked to each other, including the Historical Center, the Wright Museum, and cultural and heritage tourism sites.
 - Outreach: Assist YMCA with slavery reenactment programs. Offer advice and assistance to anyone requesting help with writing nominations;
 - Educational: Develop teaching materials (Wright Museum has lots of information and resources already). A bibliography (linking to various sites); the program Finkenbine offers each summer (could be a community-learning project).
- c. 2016 Meeting Agenda: Meetings will be held on Fridays at 11:00 AM during the months of May, August and November of 2016, and February 2017. Nassaney suggested holding one of the next two meetings in Cass County that would include lunch and a program or tour. He will look into using the Bonine House to meet and will work on details with Patrick. The other meetings will be scheduled in Lansing at this time, but everyone is invited to find other meeting places that are relevant to the commission's work.

Reports:

a. Staff: Clark reported:

- The DNR bought a portion of the Watkins Farm land to develop as part of the Laura Haviland Trail. The house was not included with the land purchase. The property needs to be listed on the Network to Freedom as soon as possible. Center staff have begun research, and descendants of the Watkins have been identified in Jackson.
- The Center has hired a trails coordinator who has been working with local communities and trail groups who have been very supportive. Kal-Haven was chosen to be the first trail to work on and it is one of the oldest of the Rails to Trails.
- Center staff have been working on a new marker database that will give people the ability to access the database on smart phones.
- Items that once belonged to Thomas Willis and his wife were donated by a descendant that lives in Mason, Michigan. The items included an arithmetic book, 1870s Bible, and the freedom papers of Frank Demas. Mr. Willis, his wife and children appear in the 1816 Kentucky census as the Frank Demas family. The 1846 manumission document is on a 12" X 20" sheet of vellum that has been conserved and is on exhibit in the Archives of Michigan.

Danquah left the meeting at 4:35 PM.

- b. Chairperson: None.
- c. Vice Chairperson: Finkenbine reported he gave an interview with WKAR, and presented at both the Birmingham Library and for the Capitol Area District Library in Lansing. He will be giving a talk with Karolyn Smardz Frost at the University of Detroit on February 19. NBC will produce "Freedom Run," an 8-part mini-series based on 3 stories that appear in Betty DeRamus' book, *Forbidden Fruit*. He has been consulted for the series that is expected to air in 2017.
- d. Commissioner Reports:
 - Nassaney provided a written report (attached). His activities included presentation of a lecture on "The Archaeology of the Underground Railroad in Southwest Michigan" at the Bloomingdale Library and at the Scott Club in South Haven. He will discuss the same topic and display artifacts from Cass County in Kalamazoo for a tour being coordinated by Michelle Johnson and Donna Odom. He is also coordinating a visit by Dr. Cheryl LaRoche to Western Michigan University.
 - Moore reported that a capacity crowd at the Wright Museum watched a PBS series about the Black Panthers. The museum is now working on an exhibit about Detroit music.
 - Teeter noted that the First Congregational Church is working with other midtown churches to market its UGRR experience and programs. The American Association of State and Local History will hold its meeting in Detroit, and attendees will be able to tour Detroit and Windsor sites.
- e. Standing Committees Updates:
 - Site, Facility and Program Identification (Danquah, Nassaney, invite Carol Mull): None.
 - Cultural and Heritage Tourism (Peebles, Teeter): None.
 - Preservation and Support (Barnes, Turner): None.
 - Education (Barnes, R. Brown, Finkenbine): None

New Business: None.

News and Announcements: None.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:03 PM, followed by dinner at a local restaurant. Commissioners then attended a panel discussion, book signing, and reception for the book, *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, edited by Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Tucker. The event was held at the University of Detroit Mercy.

Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary